

DECOLONIZE THE CANADIAN FEDERATION OF STUDENTS

For: Aboriginal and First Nations' Associations, Women's Centres, Student Unions, Anti-poverty Organizations, Anti-racism organizations, activists, social justice organizations and anyone interested in confronting oppression...

BACKGROUND: On November 4, 1997 CFS staff person Phillip Link got into an argument with CFS Aboriginal Caucus Chair Lanna Many Grey Horses at a Vancouver bar. Evidence suggests that she slapped him. Phillip responded by giving her two black eyes and a chipped tooth. He fled the bar chased by out by angry people who saw Lanna's injuries. Lanna went to the hospital and was stopped by police on the way who noticed her injuries and insisted on pressing charges.¹ Lanna didn't have money for a lawyer and relied on the Crown Prosecution which didn't give independent witnesses more than three days notice. Thus, the witnesses didn't show up to testify in court on Lanna's behalf. In June of 1998, the BC Provincial Court dismissed Phillip's charges. In the end, a native woman was assaulted and a white man was cleared by the court system. Like so many native women facing violence Lanna had very little resources with which to obtain any degree of justice. To this blatant institutionalized racism and sexism, CFS staff person Phillip Link could only suggest that "people should get over the fucking fact that she's native or [a] woman."²

CFS COMPLICITY AND COVER UP:

After the assault, Lanna was isolated by the CFS leaders who were supposedly her friends and who had become her community. "I secluded myself for four days... I was told I had to keep it quiet." She was embarrassed, left school and lost her funding. In May of 1998 at a CFS General Meeting Lanna watched Phillip being praised by CFS leaders keep this a secret and he got angry...again. She couldn't raise the issue at the meeting. She told Phillip He insisted they talk outside the meeting after she repeatedly told him "No!". She gave in and didn't raise the issue at the meeting. What if people didn't believe her? Would the CFS leadership support her? After all, CFS policy states that it "opposes patriarchy and gender oppression...[and] opposes sexism."³ Does that policy not apply to CFS?

"She's a big fucking thug, who just happens to be native and a woman."

- Phillip Link, CFS Staff Person -

Two months after the meeting, and in spite of CFS policy, Phillip Link was hired by the CFS to work in its national office instead of the BC office. Phillip acknowledged that some CFS leaders, like CFS Treasurer Joey Hansen, were aware of the assault. CFS staff person Lucy Watson, who also knew about the assault, served on Phillip's hiring committee. Given CFS's tight leadership community it would be almost impossible that CFS leaders Jennifer Story (one of Lucy's best friends) and Liz Carlyle didn't know at the time of Phillip's hiring. Not to mention former CFS Chairperson Brad Lavigne who is one of Phillip's best friends. He, along with Jennifer Story, served as chair of CFS during the 6 months following the assault and did nothing to support Lanna. CFS BC leader Maura Parte actually called Lanna and pressured her to keep the assault quiet. She repeatedly asked how many people had Lanna told. There are many more examples of CFS leaders working to silence Lanna.

¹ As reported in the Guelph Ontarion on Tuesday September 8 by Helen Hudson

² In a phone conversation with Jason Stevens, former CFS Treasurer, beginning at 7:30pm on Thursday, September 10. Phillip Link called Jason Stevens that night to profess his innocence.

³ CFS Ontario Component Policy Manual in the section entitled "Women's Issues."

To make matters worse, and with blatant racist ignorance, the CFS leadership points to the court system as “the only forum in which any impartial hearing...has taken place.”⁴ That same court system did nothing to police officer Kenneth Deane when he shot and murdered unarmed native Dudley George who was defending native land. Ironically, CFS supports the campaign by Dudley George's family for a public inquiry. The campaign for a public inquiry recognizes the inherent racism in the court system. Why don't the CFS leaders?

RACISM AND SEXISM: “A DISTRACTION FROM THE REAL ISSUES” - CFS

As Lanna, native organizations, women's groups, and activists begin to raise this issue with the CFS leadership they are told it's a staff issue, or worse “a distraction from the real issues.”⁴ Lanna lost her funding to college, and has been isolated by the racist, sexist court system not to mention getting kicked off the CFS's national executive. If these aren't the “real issues” in our society then what are? Phillip Link helped build the CFS and has a lot of friends in its leadership positions. It seems that the CFS leaders are interested in protecting him. They control the very structures that prevent justice from being carried out in this case. Whose right's is the CFS fighting for? Are these so-called leaders fit to run an organisation that claims to fight racism and sexism?

“Lanna grew up in a non-native fucking environment...not being on a reserve...not being poor.”

- Phillip Link, CFS Staff Person -

THE CAMPAIGN AND DEMANDS

Lanna is ready to fight. A small group of activists across the country are making plans to launch a national campaign to confront the racism and sexism in the CFS and to hold its leadership accountable for the racism and sexism they have perpetuated. The campaign recognizes that the CFS acted as a support mechanism for Phillip, even giving him a job in Ottawa. The campaign recognizes that the CFS is not able in its present form, to adequately address issues of racism, sexism and poverty. Following are some of the campaigns preliminary demands:

DEMANDS

1. THAT PHILLIP LINK BE DISMISSED AND BARRED FROM ANY CFS ACTIVITIES
2. THAT CFS LEADERS ELIZABETH CARLYLE, JENNIFER STORY AND JOEY HANSEN RESIGN, ALONG WITH CFS BC LEADERS MAURA PARTE, JAMIE MCEVOY, STEVE BEASLEY, AND MICHAEL CONLON
3. THAT CFS GIVE AN ANNUAL SUM OF \$200 000 FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AUTONOMOUS NATIONAL ABORIGINAL STUDENT ORGANIZATION (INDEPENDENT OF THE CFS AND WITHOUT ANY STRINGS ATTACHED)
4. THAT CFS GIVE AN ANNUAL CONTRIBUTION OF NO LESS THAN \$50 000 TO ANTI-POVERTY, ANTI-RACISM AND ANTI-SEXISM GROUPS (AS ABOVE)

This is not a campaign simply about Phillip Link. This is a campaign against racism and sexism. This campaign is aimed at abolishing any structures, processes and bureaucracy that can see a native woman assaulted and then protect the assailant. This is a campaign for justice.

If you agree with the demands and want to be considered a member of the campaign then please forward your groups' or individual's name to elvira@capcollege.bc.ca

⁴ CFS BC Public Statement released on September 2, 1998.

⁴ As reported in the Guelph Ontarion on Tuesday September 8 by Helen Hudson